If You Must Falter, Be Wise

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If You Must Falter, Be Wise

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Summary

Kink, Will insisted to himself, even as Hannibal picked up a knife and snapped his fingers in front of the man's face. Hannibal and his boyfriend were into really kinky sex, and Will was the pervert neighbor who was stalking them.

Will is on house arrest, bored out of his mind in the tiny radius his ankle bracelet allows him to explore in middle class suburbia. He starts chatting to the handsome guy next door, Hannibal, a doctor, just as boring and suburbian as the rest of them.

Right?

Notes

A gooorgeous request from a wonderful friend who asked for a Fright Night/Suburbia/Disturbia fic. We had the best time writing this bby, thank you!

See the end of the work for more notes

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [中译] If You Must Falter, Be Wise 三思而后行 by HayKer

The heavy monitor wrapped around his ankle allowed Will to step out onto the porch to let the dogs out, and to take three steps down the walkway to reach the mailbox. Sometimes, it glitched and went off halfway down the path, and his parole officer, Beverly, had to spend time convincing Judge Crawford that he wasn't *actually* a flight risk.

If anything, house arrest was a blessing. Will hadn't liked to be social to begin with, now he had an excuse.

Not a very well used one, either. The few associates he'd had before the encephalitis had all vanished after Will's feverish mind had frayed and snapped. Certainly, none had been at the trial.

It didn't matter. He had his dogs. He had an hour window twice a week during which he was permitted to visit his parole officer and buy groceries - on foot, of course. He had his books.

He missed the woods. God, did he miss the woods.

He'd had to move out from Wolf Trap for a time - he had been allowed to rent out the property for income that would go into a locked account for the duration of his parole - and into a more urban setting. Here, houses were closer, people walked by, and Will had access to the more luxury human necessities such as pizza delivery.

Curious, considering he was down for murder in the second - though his lawyers had tirelessly argued for imperfect self-defense, the jury was still out on that one, so to speak - but humane considering the reason Will snapped in the first place. The judge had deemed Will too unstable to safely house him in a prison complex, more for his own safety than those around him, and he wasn't considered insane under state law, so he wasn't eligible for a psychiatric stay.

So Will was on mandatory house arrest with a tiny perimeter of outdoor access. He was not allowed a smartphone with access to the internet. He was not allowed a computer with access to the internet. He had his old bulky TV, and the landline for emergencies and to contact his parole officer, other than that he was essentially off the grid.

Will would argue that this was a crueller sentence, this imposed isolation, but he'd always been handy. After the first month, he'd built floor to ceiling bookcases in his living room and filled them with the boxes of books he'd brought from Wolf Trap, all from the wood he'd found under the house. During the second, he'd MacGyvered himself a new showerhead and fixed the leaky sink in his kitchen.

By the third month, he was going out of his mind with boredom.

"Build a jigsaw puzzle," Bev suggested. "Get a hobby."

There weren't many hobbies one could begin using only the contents of the nearest grocery store. Will was stuck with what he had in the house. He tied flies with the scant remnants of his craft collection. He alphabetized his tiny DVD collection. He unpacked every single box.

In the bottom of one he found his binoculars. He had no idea why he'd packed them. His yard was less than a dozen feet across. He didn't need it.

Birdwatching was a hobby, he supposed. About three days in, he decided 'neighbor watching' was also a hobby.

Will had three neighbors who were regularly out and about, one on each side and one across the street. The one across the street was immediately ruled out. She was a middle aged mom who spent most of her time shuffling her kids in and out of the van, and occasionally gardening. Not interesting.

The second neighbor caught Will staring and flipped him off.

The third neighbor was Hannibal. Will knew this because he'd greeted Will the day he moved in, and deposited a casserole dish on his front porch.

Hannibal was a curious man.

Firstly, he held so rigidly to his schedule that Will could set his watch against it. Every morning, six thirty, Hannibal presumably got out of bed. The light went on upstairs and Will could track his movements by which light went on next.

The bathroom light, for precisely seventeen minutes. When that went out, the one in the hallway and stairs came on, signalling that Hannibal was moving downstairs into the kitchen. There, he spent no longer than twelve minutes before returning upstairs. By then, it was light enough outside that he no longer needed to illuminate his way, and Will had twenty minutes give or take to make himself comfortable in his living room so he could watch Hannibal in his own.

By then, Hannibal was dressed - impeccable three-piece suits, Will noted, always - and had a tiny cup of coffee in his hand that he sipped from as he turned the pages of the paper he'd picked up from the front door. Then he'd wash his cup, set it to dry on a silver rack - along with nothing else, he did his dishes religiously every evening - and leave Will's line of sight.

Within five minutes, his garage would open and Hannibal would pull out onto their quaint suburban street in his pristine Bentley and drive past Will's house on his way to wherever he was going.

Once he noticed Will watching, he'd wave as he drove by.

Will started to wave back.

Will was lonely during the day for the first time in his life. He found himself sitting in the front window, waiting for Hannibal to return. In his head, they'd almost developed a friendship, though in truth they'd exchanged hardly a dozen words.

Of course, you could only watch someone for so long before they began to look back.

"That's a lot of dogs for such a small house," Hannibal noted one evening, leaning over the fence that divided their backyards. Will hovered awkwardly on the porch, unsure if he should

approach, or if his ankle monitor would even allow it.

“They’re well-behaved,” he said. “Don’t make too much of a mess.”

“I’ve always been fond of animals.” Hannibal let a hand fall over the fence, smiling when Buster came to sniff at it. “They’ve never seemed particularly suited to my home, but I enjoy them.”

You’re welcome to come by and spend time with them . Will thought with a smile. Out loud, he said, “Busy work schedule?”

“Unfortunately so,” Hannibal agreed, spreading his fingers for the eager creatures to sniff at and lick between. Will found it warmed him that Hannibal didn’t immediately drag his hand away in some dramatic display of disgust. If he was bothered by it at all, he didn’t show it outwardly. “I see clients daily, and sometimes work late into the evening. It would be cruel to subject a creature to my timetable.”

Will drew a hand through his hair and stepped down into the grass. He knew very vaguely how far he could go before the thing keeping him prisoner sent out a silent nark-alarm to the police. To be safe, he kept one foot behind him as he leaned over the fence next to Hannibal, close enough to talk quietly, close enough to almost be intimate.

It had been a long time since Will had been intimate with anyone.

“Lawyer?” Will ventured, amused.

“Doctor,” Hannibal countered, his smile just as pleased, as though they were sharing a secret no one else knew. “Although some of my nurses say I need to work on my bedside manner.”

“Can’t be any worse than mine.” In fact, Will doubted Hannibal could be half as cold or awkward as he was. But then, he may have been reading too much into his stalking. He’d begun to feel as though he and Hannibal were spending their mornings together.

“I’m afraid you haven’t seen me running low on coffee,” Hannibal said.

It had never been easy to talk to someone before, and yet Hannibal began to fill Will’s evenings as easily as he filled his mornings. They would meet just as dusk began to darken the sky, and talk about their days, Will’s occasionally exaggerated and largely about the dogs. He claimed to be an introvert. He didn’t tell Hannibal about the monitor.

Hannibal was a good man. He passed Will leftovers over the fence and fed treats to the dogs. As the weeks passed, Will realized he was achingly, stupidly fond of him.

So, of course, that was when things went to shit.

Will had never been a sound sleeper. Even before the mess that had gotten him into *this* mess, he’d never managed more than a few hours of sleep a night from high school right up to the moment he got sick. And after that… well, after…

So when he woke at three in the morning and decided that the only morally right thing to do would be to make himself a cup of coffee, he was surprised to find that Hannibal seemed to have a similar idea.

His kitchen light was on, as was the light in the basement. A tiny window Will had barely noticed when he'd watched Hannibal during the day, but that was impossible to miss at night as it shone like a goddamn beacon across Hannibal's lawn and up to the fence they shared.

Will made his coffee. He kept the dogs inside, and he skirted the edge of his house to make sure his damn tracker didn't go off as he approached the thin sliver of light his fence let through. He crouched, trying to catch a glimpse, then decided that fuck it, if he was out here he might as well, and moved to lay on his stomach as well, bare feet pressed to the side of his house, one eye up against the slit between the wooden slats.

The window was positioned in such a way that it showed the upper portion of the basement; if one were to stand up against it inside, their eyes and the bridge of their nose would be able to look out onto the grass beyond. Because of this, it took Will awhile to realize what he was seeing.

The entire place was immaculate, which wasn't surprising considering this was *Hannibal* , but it was set up as an autopsy room might be, rather than a suburban man cave or dusty storage unit. Will snorted. Maybe Hannibal was kinky, had a thing for roleplay and Will was about to be witness to some surprise pornography. Maybe he was just damn weird. There were freezers that lined one wall of the basement, racks of shelving against another. Maybe it was just storage after all, maybe the table equipment Hannibal was keeping for the hospital.

Even as Will thought it he knew it was utter bullshit.

As he watched, Hannibal came into view. His suit looked oddly shiny, light reflecting off it as he moved, as if he'd been coated in some sort of gloss. He was carrying something over his shoulder, something large and pale and-

Hannibal slung the body down onto the table. A man, Will's age, perhaps. Naked and unconscious, but clearly alive, given the effort Hannibal went to tying him down.

Kink, Will insisted to himself, even as Hannibal picked up a knife and snapped his fingers in front of the man's face. Hannibal and his boyfriend were into really kinky sex, and Will was the pervert neighbor who was stalking them.

The man appeared to wake, jerking on the table. Hannibal made some sort of motion Will couldn't see properly, his hand dropping out of sight.

It came up red and dripping, and the man's face contorted into what must have been a scream. Will was frozen in place, beads of sweat running down the back of his neck.

Will wasn't stupid, and he wouldn't call himself naive either; he'd been a cop for a good few years and he'd seen some shit. But it was just impossible, absolutely statistically improbable that his next door neighbor was killing someone in his basement right now. But then

Hannibal bent again, and the man on the table was growing sickeningly pale, and Will knew, he *knew in his gut* that he needed to get the fuck up and call someone, *right now.*

He scrambled up, hand catching the handle of his coffee mug and spilling the still-hot liquid over his toes.

“Fuck!” he caught himself against the fence, the flimsy thing creaking beneath his weight, and rubbed his foot, cursing himself over and over for being such a goddamn idiot. When he looked up again, Hannibal was looking at him through the basement window, still by his table - the man atop wasn’t moving anymore - but his head was tilted in a way dogs did when they were seeking a particular sound.

Will stared.

Hannibal stared back.

Then he moved, inhumanly quick, and hit the lights, throwing himself and the entire scene Will had witnessed into darkness.

“Shit,” Will breathed, “shit, oh shit,”

He ran back into the house, uncaring that he woke his dogs slamming the door, uncaring that he woke anyone. He should wake people, he had to tell them. But before getting innocents involved he had to get the cops. He grabbed his phone and dialed quickly, shoving the thing against his ear as he caught his breath.

No dial tone.

He dialed it again, though he knew the result would be the same. Nothing. Silence.

“Will.”

Hannibal’s voice drifted in from the backyard, soft and silky. As calm and as pleasant as he’d ever been during their talks. Almost seductive.

“Will.”

Smooth and drifting on the wind. Will stared at the back door, slightly ajar, thin and flimsy between himself and the murderer next door.

As if possessed, Will took slow, measured steps out onto the back porch. Hannibal was leaning over the fence, smiling like he always did. He wore a plastic suit over his regular suit, and there was a smear of blood across the collar.

“It’s a lovely evening, isn’t it?”

Will swallowed, dry tongue darting out to lick dry lips. He wasn’t sure that Hannibal wouldn’t off him as soon as he got within range. He wasn’t sure why he was even *considering* getting closer. Something came to mind about cobras being able to hypnotize their prey, but Will shoved that to the side. That wasn’t important now.

“It’s morning,” Will pointed out gently, as he stepped off the porch and onto the grass. He still had his phone in his hand, he realized, because Hannibal’s eyes immediately slipped to it when he saw. Again that head tilt, damn near reptilian in the smoothness of the motion, before Hannibal hummed.

“Will,” he sounded disappointed, as though he had expected this from anyone but his neighbor. “With a phone like that, *who you gonna call?”*

For a moment Will was taken completely aback. He’d grown used to Hannibal’s dry humor, thoroughly enjoyed it, actually, but this felt so *wrong* . He knew. He knew the phone wouldn’t work, which meant he had done something to ensure it wouldn’t. Will wondered if it was the whole street, if he’d cut off the entire neighborhood for the night. It made Will feel a bit sick. And yet, he could feel that tickle build up against the back of his throat, threatening a laugh that Will knew once started wouldn’t stop. He needed to keep his head. He needed to *do something* .

“Unless he’s coming for revenge after shaking off his mortal coil, they might not be much help,” Will managed, gesturing unnecessarily in the direction of the basement window. Hannibal’s smile was all teeth.

“That’s good, Will. That’s very good. Very clever. I’ve rather enjoyed your cleverness.”

Will swallowed again. “Past tense?”

“Well, I’m afraid that that depends entirely on you. *Neighbor.”*

Will hesitated.

If he fled, would Hannibal catch him? If he left the property, alerted the police, would he violate his parole?

Hannibal smiled at him, eyes narrowed. “I notice you haven’t run yet, Will. I wonder why that is?”

He knew. He knew he had Will trapped and he knew why, despite his posturing.

“Do you think, Will, that you can use this in your defense? Time off for being a good boy?” Hannibal’s grin sharpened and grew fangs. “Or do you think they’ll lock you up regardless?”

The thought had occurred to Will. His lawyer seemed confident when Will spoke to him, but no one else did. It was not a matter of guilt. A man was dead and by Will’s hands. There was only a matter of defense to consider.

“You owe them nothing,” Hannibal said softly.

Will blinked. He knew he didn't. He knew and remembered what had driven him to break, and it was as much the fault of the department as anyone's. Too much stress, too much pressure, such high expectations of a young man with Will's skills and grades and history.

They'd pushed and he'd snapped, and then they'd hidden him away, a broken toy in the attic for someone else to find later.

Not their problem.

Will gestured with his chin. "What did he do?"

Hannibal made a show of looking over his shoulder before looking at Will again.

"He was extraordinarily rude." He said after a moment. "I cannot stand for such things."

"So you disemboweled him in your basement?"

Hannibal hadn't stopped smiling, but something in his gaze shifted and Will felt cold. "One does what one can, in difficult circumstances."

Will did laugh then, a helpless sound far too high and sharp. “I’m not exactly known for my *politeness* , Hannibal, why am *I* still here?”

“I told you,” Hannibal reminded him. “I enjoy your cleverness. I find you interesting.”

“How interesting?”

“Come closer and find out.”

Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly.

And yet Will’s feet were moving, bringing him closer. If Hannibal killed him now…

Well, he could hardly be said to be living as it was.

“I could have you arrested,” Will murmured, as he inched closer and closer to the fence.

“But we both know you won’t. Why is that?”

Will swallowed. “Because I find you interesting,” he echoed.

Hannibal’s hand reached for him, knuckles rubbing gently over Will’s cheekbones. “You panicked,” he said. “I read the articles. Your mind was burning and you frightened a man who intended to rob you. He lashed out. You lashed back. How did it feel?”

“Amazing,” Will whispered.

“Remarkable boy,” Hannibal praised him, and Will *liked it* . He liked being seen; not as someone crazy, not as someone pitiful, not as someone broken but as a man capable of great and terrible things.

“How did you feel?” Will asked back, voice just as soft, just as warm. There was just the fence between them, now. “The first time you killed, how did you feel?”

“Like God,” Hannibal replied, catching Will’s eyes when he met them. “Killing must feel good to God. He does it all the time. And are we not created in his image?”

Will snorted, but he didn’t step away, turning his face into the palm of Hannibal’s hand. “That depends on who you ask.”

“Did you know,” Hannibal said, leaning near enough that their foreheads touched, that their noses brushed together. Will could feel Hannibal’s warm breath against his lips as he spoke, he couldn’t keep him in focus with how close they were. “He dropped a church roof on thirty-four of his worshipers last Wednesday night while they sang a hymn to him.”

Will laughed, breathy and warm, bringing his own hand up to touch Hannibal’s face in turn. “And how did God feel about that?”

“Powerful.” The word was lost between them. Will wasn’t sure who moved first, but when their lips pressed together it entirely didn’t matter. He let his useless phone fall to the ground at his feet and wrapped both arms over Hannibal’s shoulders as they kissed, parting his lips when Hannibal guided him to, keeping his eyes shut because he wanted to.

There was something about Hannibal, something vibrant and sharp. He tasted like copper, like *life.*

“I don’t know what I’m doing,” Will whispered.

“Living.”

Hannibal tangled his fingers in Will’s curls and tilted his head back further, kissing him so soundly that Will was breathless with it.

“I would have liked to see it,” Hannibal growled, “you, in all your glory, vicious and biting.”

“I don’t remember it.”

“You’ll remember the next one.”

The *next* one. This was ridiculous. And yet Will groaned and clung to Hannibal's shoulders.

“Come inside,” he gasped. “Clean up your mess and come over.”

Hannibal pressed a kiss to the corner of Will’s eye and let him go, moving back into the house without a word. He did look back, though, when he reached the door, and caught Will’s gaze before disappearing.

Hannibal stayed the night.

Between frantic sex, and dirty talk that should not have been dirty to anyone, they exhausted themselves and were dozing as the sun came up. Hannibal silenced his alarm with a quiet sound and tucked his nose into Will’s hair as the man continued to sleep beside him.

When Will finally woke, having slept better than he had in *years* , Hannibal wasn't in bed with him, but a note on his kitchen counter along with a bag of very high end coffee suggested that he would see Will that evening, and bring dinner.

On her next visit, Beverly commented on how much happier Will looked than the week before. Will just shrugged.

"Putting together a puzzle," he told her, "just like you said."

"Can I see it?"

Will scratched the back of his head with an apologetic look. "It's pretty unpleasant as a work in progress. I'll show you when I'm done."

Beverly had smiled, that sly bright thing that made her so easy to like. "I'll hold you to it."

Every night, Hannibal came over.

Every night, they talked about getting out. Of suburbia, of Maryland, of America.

"They took your independence," Hannibal murmured, drawing his lips over the skin just above Will's ankle monitor. "Your freedom. Unconscionable."

"Could've been worse," Will shrugged, though he didn't believe it himself anymore. "Could be in jail."

The glint in Hannibal's eyes spoke to unpleasant thoughts and revenges they couldn't take. "You defended yourself and elevated your attacker to art, and yet you are the one to be punished."

"No one said the law was fair."

Hannibal's teeth grazed Will's skin, more promise than threat. Will closed his eyes with a shaky breath.

Hannibal made love to him more fiercely than ever that night. In the morning he left a flight itinerary for one person and seven dogs.

"You would have me go without you?" Will asked that evening.

"I would have the dogs go ahead of both of us," Hannibal explained, "in the care of a very good friend. We would join them, of course."

"When?"

Hannibal nuzzled his throat, kissing at the stuttering pulse beneath Will's jaw. "After the honeymoon."

Both understood that neither spoke of a conventional wedding. No need for proposals and rings, no need for frippery. Understanding connected them, and desire drove them. Will

started planning his excuses immediately.

“It’s getting a bit much,” Will admitted to Beverly over coffee the next time she came by. “Dad said he’d take ‘em. He just lost one of his own and he’s got a huge property by the water.”

“Sucks you have to let them go,” Beverly said, lips pursing in a pout. Will wished he didn’t have to lie to her. Of all the people dealing with his case, she’d been the only one who’d attempted to give a shit.

“It’s not forever,” Will reasoned. “Just til I’ve got my life on track again.”

The dogs left at the end of the month, and Will found the silence of the house to be overwhelming without them. He’d never been totally alone, never in his life, and for the first time he *was* . He was a mess by the time Hannibal got home. He called out for the next three days to care for Will properly.

“Papers are not the problem,” Hannibal reminded him as he and Will sat out on the porch watching the sky. “Our biggest hurdle is the device on your ankle.”

“I’ve bumped it a couple times before,” Will shrugged. “Usually I get a call from Bev asking what’s up, then a visit from the team to reset it and make sure I haven’t done anything *untoward.”*

“What was their response time?”

“Bev calls almost immediately - she and the cops get a ping on an app or something. The team… about eight minutes, give or take.”

“Time them,” Hannibal suggested, settling a curl behind Will’s ear and kissing his cheek.

So Will did.

Apologizing profusely to Bev on the phone saying he tripped on his way to the mailbox and landed outside the radius. She made a couple of jokes, Will laughed. The team arrived in just under nine minutes and took their time getting out of the car and to Will’s front door. With a response like that, they had perhaps three minutes more of buffer time.

“If we move quickly enough, that gives us several miles of distance,” Hannibal noted over dinner and wine.

“I’m a flight risk,” Will reminded him. “They’ll be watching the airports and the borders.”

“We won’t be at either.” Hannibal lifted Will’s hand from the table, brushing a kiss across the knuckles. “I did promise you a honeymoon.”

The plan was to journey down the coast. They’d lay low in Florida, where Hannibal would lease a private beach house. They’d stay there a few weeks until the buzz died down, change their hair, and take a boat ride to Santa Clara, Cuba, where they would finally board a plane.

It sounded ridiculously risky to Will. No one would expect it, of course, since it was well out of his financial means, but he was slightly skeptical of their ability to pull it off.

“I’m no stranger to vanishing,” Hannibal assured him. “And Chiyoh tells me the dogs have missed you.”

“I can’t believe you took them to a castle,” Will snorted, lifting a brow when Hannibal smiled. “I can’t believe you’re taking me to one.”

“For a time,” Hannibal agreed. “And then to Europe. I want to show you Florence, Will.”

“Show me everything,” Will agreed, almost haughty in the demand. “I’ve never been outside the States.”

“We have time,” Hannibal assured him. Will made himself believe it.

When Bev came next time she brought news of Will’s case.

“They can’t get the jury to agree on a conviction still,” she told him. “Judge Crawford’s prepared to give you the benefit of the doubt, considering, but it’s out of his hands til it’s literally in his hands, so.”

Will snorted, shaking his head. “I can’t exactly live on house arrest the rest of my life.”

“Nah, just a decade or so,” Bev shrugged, grinning when Will gave her a look. “It’s not so bad, is it? I wouldn’t mind being home all day.”

“It gets old,” Will admitted. “Besides, you’d lose your mind without the internet.”

“God, yeah you’re right, scratch that, we’re not swapping places.”

Will walked her to the door and leaned against the frame as she made her way down the path. She tripped near the mailbox too, looking back and Will with a laugh.

“Should get someone to look at that!”

“Till I do will, you keep the team off my ass if I fall over again?”

Bev grinned. “I’ll try, Graham, be good.”

Will knew he’d never see her again.

They made their move on a Saturday morning.

“More eyes,” Will had said warily.

“More to blend in with,” Hannibal had reassured him.

Will would be leaving most things behind. He wasn’t able to make the trip to Wolf Trap, though Hannibal had offered to make it for him, and he couldn’t be seen sending too much out to Hannibal’s car, which they would need to swap anyway. Hannibal pulled the car

around back to allow Will the coverage of the fence, and Will stood on his back porch looking in at the house that had never been home.

“Any last minute additions?” Hannibal asked. Will shook his head.

“Everything I care about is in a castle in Lithuania,” he said wryly. “Except for you.”

He sat down on the porch, leg extended towards Hannibal, phone in hand. Waiting. Hannibal had brought bolt cutters big and sharp enough to make Will nervous so close to his skin.

“We need to damage it thoroughly, so that it can’t be used to track us if we can’t get it off.”

They needn’t have worried. The bolt cutters snapped through the band easily, and the shackle that tethered Will to the house dropped to the porch.

One second. Two. Three. Four. Five. *Ring.*

Will took a breath, brought the phone to his ear. “Hi, Bev,”

End Notes

Title from Rihanna's Disturbia.

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